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The Integrated Maritime Policy as a source of innovation, employment and growth

Check Against Delivery
Seul le texte prononcé fait foi
Es gilt das gesprochene Wort

European Maritime Day Stakeholder Conference

Gijón (Spain), 20 May 2010

Your Royal Highness, distinguished participants, ladies and gentlemen

It is a great pleasure and honor to be here today as European Commissioner for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries. I would like to thank the Spanish Presidency, the Community of Asturias, and the city of Gijón, for organising this year's events. I would also like to thank them all for this opportunity to address the distinguished audience of this stakeholder conference, and to share some thoughts about our Integrated Maritime Policy, innovation and blue growth.

This venue could hardly be more fitting. I am really glad that this year's European Maritime Day events take place in Spain, with its unique contribution to world maritime history. The city of Gijón is a perfect example. It is a truly maritime city that knows what it means to live from the sea, what it means to live with the sea. It is a city that has been able to reconcile maritime tradition that goes back to the Roman period and the pre-Christian times with maritime industrial development and innovation.

The choice of "Innovation" as this year's main theme for this conference is also particularly timely. It is one of the core elements that make up the Integrated Maritime Policy (IMP) that we are promoting at European level.

We all know that European maritime history has been a driver for many major European successes. I would argue that it has been a leading force exceptionally because it is a sector that has been in constant movement – just like the sea - in constant search of improvement, in constant search of innovation.

But what does innovation mean for the Integrated Maritime Policy? It means of course fostering the development of new technology solutions such as offshore sources of energy and blue biotechnologies. Promoting areas such as new design for green ships or a greater focus on sustainable coastal tourism. But in the true spirit of the Policy, it also means integrating innovation from a cross-cutting perspective: innovation in one area should benefit all policy areas.

President Barroso already mentioned in his video message that innovation, growth and jobs are also at the heart of the EU 2020 strategy. Through this strategy the European Union has resolved to tackle the current economic downturn and equip Europe with the solid growth and job creation tools. In this context, our oceans and seas have received particular attention as a future key source of growth. To contribute efficiently to the success of this Strategy, we are about to launch a study on the "Scenarios and drivers for sustainable growth from oceans, sea and coasts". This study will help us to identify future sources of sustainable growth and employment based on marine resources in established, emerging or future maritime sectors and in the coastal regions.

This focus on innovation, growth and jobs is just one of six priorities outlined in the Commission's Progress Report on the Integrated Maritime Policy. In brief, the other five priorities cover:

- enhanced and coordinated governance of the whole sector
- the further development of cross-cutting tools such as Maritime Spatial Planning, a Marine knowledge network and an Integrated maritime surveillance system;
- an appropriate balance between economy, social well-being and environmental responsibility;
- development of sea-basin strategies
- the international dimension, with Europe as a front runner in improving global maritime governance.

Naturally, the many initiatives we wish to undertake under this ambitious policy have a cost. The Commission will soon propose a draft regulation on financing the Policy in the coming two years. We will also be active in the discussions on appropriate funding in years beyond.

I am happy to say that the European Union's Integrated Maritime Policy is well on track. We have achieved a great deal in a short time. Now we must look to build on our achievements.

Your Royal Highness, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The European Commission is proud for its initiative and contribution to the continued success of the European Maritime Day as a unique annual event. I have to mention here my predecessor Commissioner Borg for his contribution : We now have an event that brings together stakeholders from different maritime interests, sector and regions. This success could not have been achieved without everyone's efforts: the Member States, the European Parliament, the coastal regions of Europe, and of course the strong involvement of our stakeholders. Because ultimately the European Maritime Day, and in fact the Integrated Maritime Policy as a whole, has always been about stakeholders: you make the policy work, you drive it forward.

Now, it is time to bring the European Maritime Day to a new stage. I invited the Member States to examine together how best to develop this initiative, and make it even more productive and valuable to the European maritime Community. I think indeed that we should re-examine together the selection criteria used to determine the location of the European Maritime Day before deciding on this issue.

I would like in conclusion to thank once again the local, regional, and national authorities for bringing together 1250 participants from 24 diverse countries and a lot of regions. This year's event comes to confirm once again that our common maritime heritage is something that bridges any difference, something that can truly unite us.

I thank you for your attention.